

“Effect of Using Task-Based Approach on Developing Oral Communication Skills among an EFL Class of University Students”

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Abstract

The present study investigated oral communication skills of English language learner's university context by using a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach. Fifty students of Business English course were selected as participants, and randomly divided into two groups. The participants in the experimental group were taught oral presentation skills through task-based language teaching, while the control group received the same hours of instruction through traditional approach. Both groups were tested a pretest and post-test and then a comparison was made by an independent-samples t-test to check the possible significance differences between the two groups. The results revealed that students who were taught through (TBLT) had a significant improvement in fluency, pronunciation skills rather than traditional approach. Also participants in experimental group had shown a remarkable improvement TBLT was applied in speaking skill.

Keyword: Task based Language Teaching (TBLT), Oral Communication Skills.

1. Introduction

Recently, English Language has become widely used in Business sectors and Industries. Due to the profound change of English Language as lingua franca and the Language for International trade and finance, EFL learners are asked to enhance their communications skills, to cope with increasingly fierce international competition.

Most of universities and colleges have offered ESP courses and Business English to develop communications skills of learners. New books and materials have been introduced focusing on oral communications skills such as: telephoning, presentation skills, English for socializing.

However, there is a critical problem in teaching oral communication skills and speaking skill, resulting from inappropriate teaching techniques and strategies.

Traditionally, the most common teaching approach applied in EFL classes at universities, is teacher- centered and lecture-oriented approach. As a consequence, learners have difficulties in practicing oral communication skills and speaking skills, since they need to be exposed to a real language situation that resemble a real life communication.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been established for some time now as one of the main approaches to language learning and teaching worldwide (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Samuda & Bygate 2008; Van den Branden, 2006). For a long time, research on language learning and teaching has followed two different research paradigms, the psycholinguistic approach and the sociocultural approach (Ellis, 2003). Many researches have been conducted in this area, but few have focused on implementing TBLT in teaching speaking skill. Ellis (2003) reports that task-based language teaching is a form of teaching that treats language primarily as a tool for communicating rather than as a subject for study or manipulation. It is clear that if learners are to develop the competence they need in order to use a second language easily and effectively in the kinds of situations they meet outside the classroom, they need to experience how language is used as a tool for communication within it. "Task" serves as the most obvious means for organizing teaching along these lines. Therefore, Task-based Learning Technique (TBLT) is beneficial to promote students speaking achievements (Sinatra2009).

This study therefore, aims at developing speaking skills by using Task-Based approach. It also aims at investigating the effect of using TBLT with university students on developing speaking skills.

1.1. The Advantages of Task-based Approach

Compare to traditional teaching methods, task-based approach can give learners better initiative and make them more active in class. In traditional English teaching process, the contents and outcomes of teaching are completely controlled by teachers. There is no real language environment and meaningful communication. Learners can just passively learn some isolated grammar rules or expressions and can't use the target language to communicate and express their feelings and thoughts freely. On the contrary, in task-based approach, teachers design some familiar activities in everyday life to create real or relatively real language environment to stimulate learners' interests and teach them how to socialize and communicate in certain occasions. Task-based approach highlights its feature of the Chinese saying "learning is to use". It is an effective teaching method whose tasks can improve the structure of classroom teaching, propel learners to learn and to utilize English in activities and help learners get together to cooperate and experience the success and joy in English learning.

It shortens the distance between teaching contents and everyday life. The ultimate goal of language teaching is to make learners fulfill the communicative.

2. Problem statement

Communications skills and ability to speak English fluently has become the key for employment in the job market, almost every institution requires good command in English and ability to communicate efficiently and fluently.

Most of Sudanese graduated lack ability to communicate effectively and fluently. They are still unable to use the language in real life. It is true that they know grammar very well and can read and understand in English, but cannot confidently be able to take part in a conversation on every day topics.

This difficulty is due to the inappropriate technique and methodology of teaching ESP courses at universities.

In order to enhance the speaking ability of Sudanese university students, the researcher proposed using Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an effective technique to promote speaking skill in an EFL class.

3. The significance of the study

The Significance of this study stems the following factors:

- 1- It attempts to examine the effect of using Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) for developing the speaking skills of Sudanese students at the tertiary level. In addition, the findings could be useful to implement this technique in all ESP courses offered at this university.
- 2- This study may provide EFL teachers and ESP practitioners with a specific language teaching strategies which they can use in their classroom to enhance their students' achievement in oral communication skills.
- 3- The research results can be presented to ESP course developer's decision-maker in order to enhance the students' performance in English as a foreign language.
- 4- Communication skills and speaking fluently have been the required skills for employment and job market. Almost every employer needs a good command in English and ability to communicate efficiently.

4. The Objectives

This proposed study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- 1- To investigate the role of using TBLT on developing oral speaking of students at universities.
- 2- To improve speaking skills of students at Sudan academy for Banking by implementing TBLT.
- 3- To propose speaking strategy to be implemented inside classroom

5. Research Hypothesis

- 1- Applying Task-Based Language Teaching develop speaking skill students.
- 2- There is a significant difference in terms of speaking proficiency development between using TBLT vs. Traditional
- 3- Applying speaking strategy motivate students and stimulate fluency.

6. Methodology

6.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 100 students of Sudan Academy for Banking and Financial Sciences (SABFS) .A Simple random sampling procedure was followed as described by Mugenda (2008).They were selected from the population. They were divided later , for the purpose of the study, into two groups: an Experimental and a Controlled group (see table (1)).

Table(1): The number of participants

Group	No of Male	No of female	Total
Experimental	17	33	50
Controlled	22	28	50

6.2. Instruments and Procedures for Data Collection

In order to collect data on this study, pre-post oral treatment tests were used. Also a questionnaire for the experimental group was used to measure the students responses to the

use of task based approaches in their language classroom. Moreover, how tasks helped them to enhance their speaking skill.

6.3. Speaking tests Design

The peaking tests are conducted, designed and developed by the researchers. It was validated by a panel of university teachers, educators and language administrators. The tests include evaluation rubric for speaking skills particularly oral presentation skill. Participants were given a topic for individual presentation. Then they were evaluated accordingly.

They were two tests; one before the application of the TBLT approach and one after it. The test include six elements to measure speaking ability:

Fluency, Pronunciation, Grammar, Content and Total point (score)

Each item is given from 1-5 marks according to peaking test rubric (See the appendix). The total marks (score) is 25 marks.

7. Results and analysis

7.1 Speaking Tests for the Experimental Group:

The speaking test includes six items : Fluency , pronunciation , grammar ,vocabulary , content , total score .To examine the significance of each item in pre/and posttest , the Paired Samples T-Test was used ..

Table (2): Paired -Sample Test

Speaking Skills (Pre/Post Test)	Paired Statistics					Result
	Mean Diff.	N	Std	T	Sig.	
Pre-fluency – fluency	1.180	50	0.961	12.079	0.000	significant
Pre-pronunciation- pronunciation	0.900	50	0.735	8.654	0.000	significant
Pre-grammar – Grammar	0.340	50	0.593	4.056	0.000	significant
Pre-vocabulary – Vocabulary	0.900	50	0.857	6.600	0.000	significant
Pre-content – Content	1.500	50	0.763	13.908	0.000	significant

Source: On calculation

As shown in table (2) the p value is less than (0.05). Therefore, each item in the test has a significant value and can be used to test variables of the study.

The results also have shown that there is a significant differences in the mean between the pretest and posttest ($M = 0.340 - 1.180$) . This indicates that speaking skills has improved before using TBL and after using TBL .

Fluency and content have shown a remarkable change in mean ($M=1.180 , 1.50$) which supports the study hypothesis that using TBL has significantly improved speaking skill. Pronunciation and vocabulary have also a significant change of mean ($M = 0.900$) . However they are less than fluency and content, but they also confirm that speaking skill has improved when applying TBL technique,

Despite the fact that grammar has less significant change ($M = 0.340$) this result is in conformity with the other results since grammar is not the major concern of the study, rather than it is one of tested item in speaking skill.

7.2. Comparison between Pretest and Post-test :

Table (3): Progress percent in Experimental Group

Test Items	Test	Mean	SD	Progress
Fluency	Pre-test	2.78	0.975	42.4%
	Post-test	3.96	0.570	
Pronunciation	Pre-test	3.16	0.774	28.5%
	Post-test	4.06	0.586	
Grammar	Pre-test	3.04	0.677	11.2%
	Post-test	3.38	0.567	
Vocabulary	Pre-test	2.80	0.792	28.6%
	Post-test	3.60	0.728	
Content	Pre-test	2.90	0.760	51.7%
	Post-test	4.40	0.606	
Total score	Pre-test	13.10	2.859	47.5%
	Post-test	19.32	2.403	

Source: On calculation

$$(Progress = (post-test\ mean - pretest\ mean) / pre-test\ mean)$$

As shown in the above table (3) , there is a remarkable change when applying Task based technique with students . It is clear that students have shown remarkable progress in content

(51.7%) which reveals that their ability to deliver oral presentation and understanding the topic of their presentation has improved .

Moreover, fluency has improved relatively before applying TBL and after applying TBL (42.4 %). However, grammar as one item of the test has shown little change compared with the other test items . This result reflect ,as mentioned in Table (2) that grammar is not the focus of the research problem but as one of the sub-skill of speaking skill. Thus it received little attention in teaching materials as supporting speaking skill.

Vocabulary also , has shown a noticeable change before using TBL and after applying TBL (28,6%)

Apparently, the overall performance of students in post-test has improved with (47.7%) compared with the pre-test . Thus, applying TBL has a significant effect in developing speaking skill .

7.3. Pre/post tests in the Control group

Controlled group is the group which receives no treatment, thus worked with traditional method Presentation Practice Production (PPP). The result of the Paired Samples T-Test are as follows:

Table (4): Paired Samples T-Test

Speaking Skills (Pre/Post Test)	Paired Statistics		T	Sig.	Result
	Mean diff.	Std.			
Pre-fluency - Fluency	0.460	.646	5.039	0.000	Significant
Pre-pronunciation - Pronunciation	0.200	.404	3.500	0.001	Significant
Pre-grammar - Grammar	0.180	.438	2.909	0.005	Significant
Pre-content - content	0.840	.817	7.269	0.000	Significant
Pre-vocabulary - vocabulary	0.700	.735	6.731	0.000	Significant
Pre- total points - Total points	2.180	1.662	9.274	0.000	Significant

Source: On calculation

The most remarkable result to emerge from the data in table (4) is that there is a slight difference in mean between pretest and post-test in pronunciation(0.200). This result indicates that traditional method (PPP) does not improve speaking skill. However , all test items are significant (P- value < 0.05) , but there is slight difference between pre/post test .

As shown in the result there is a difference in mean for content and vocabulary (0.840 , 0.700) . This result is an evidence for validity and reliability of test items rather than the method used with the control group.

Table (5):Progress percent in control group

Test Items	Test	Mean	SD	Progress%
Fluency	Pre-test	2.42	0.731	19%
	Post-test	2.88	0.689	
Pronunciation	Pre-test	2.50	0.678	8%
	Post-test	2.70	0.614	
Grammar	Pre-test	2.82	0.774	6%
	Post-test	3.00	0.700	
Vocabulary	Pre-test	2.84	0.792	24.6%
	Post-test	3.54	0.762	
Content	Pre-test	3.36	0.789	33%
	Post-test	2.52	0.851	
Total score	Pre-test	3.12	2.826	16.6%
	Post-test	15.30	2.410	

Source: On calculation

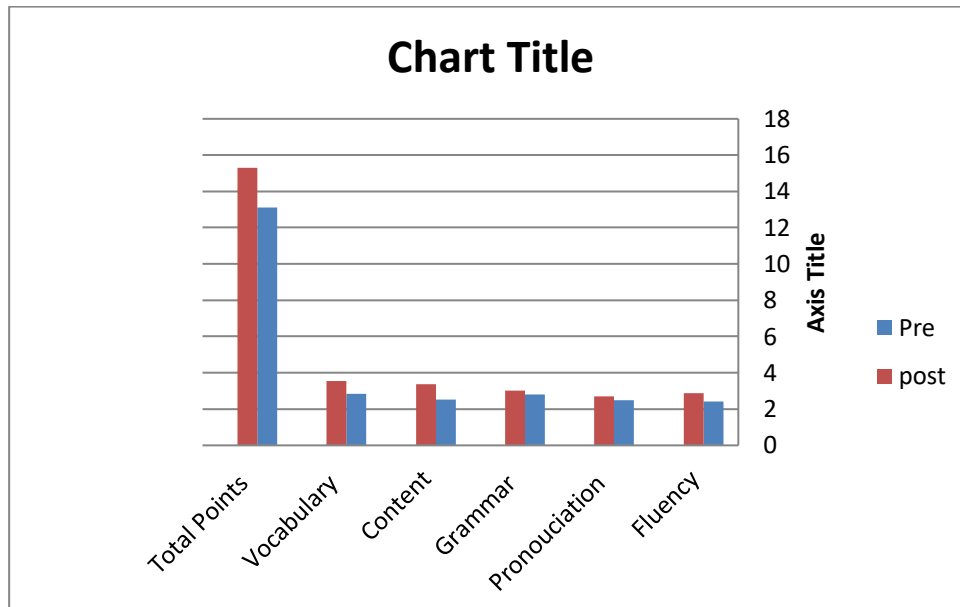
As shown in the result of pre/post test for the control group , the lowest change is in grammar (6%) . This result support the idea of the study that grammar is not the major concern rather than one of the test items to assess speaking .

Clearly , pronunciation and fluency (8% , 19%) have shown lower change compared to the experimental group (28.5% , 42.4%). Thus using traditional methods has little effect on improving speaking skills .

However , content shows a relatively high percentage other test items (33%) but it is lower than the experimental group.

Therefore , test items analysis in the control group have shown lower progress in speaking skills than in the experimental group.

Figure (1):The Pre/post Tests in Control group



Source: On calculation

7.4. Comparison between Experimental and Controlled group :

As we have seen the data for controlled group and experimental group , the study will also analyse data for both groups.

The most common statistical analysis used to compare between two methods with different participants is known as "Independent Samples T- Test "

Table (6): Independent Samples Test

Test items	T-test for Equality of Means				
	T	df	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Result
Fluency	-8.538	94.663	0.000	1.080	Significant
Pronunciation	-11.327	97.779	0.000	1.360	Significant
Grammar	-2.982	98	0.004	0.380	Significant
Content	7.037	88.515	0.000	1.040	Significant
Vocabulary	-.403	98	0.688	0.060	Non-significant

Total point	-8.354	98	0.000	4.020	Significant
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Source: On calculation

Results in table (6) showed that the P-value is less than (0.05). This reveals that there was a significant differences in test score when using TBL technique . However , the results showed that there was no significant difference in vocabulary (sig = 0.688). This means that participants in both group (experimental/controlled) do not show any difference for vocabulary in post tests . The interpretation for this result is that vocabulary is not the major concern of this study , thus the result is acceptable to the study since the main focus is on speaking skill. Furthermore, the difference in mean for fluency (M = 1.080) and for pronunciation (M =1.360) and for content (M =1.040) indicates that there was a significant difference between the two group when applying TBL. This result has strengthened the reseach hypothesis that TBL has improved students` speaking skill.

However, grammar shows less value in mean difference (M = 0.380) , but it also indicates that there was a significat difference between each group. It also means participants have shown a remarkable chnange when TBL is applied in fluency , pronouncaition and content rather than grammar.

7.5. Progress in test items in Experimental and Controlled Group :

In this section of analysis , the study will consider how participants improved in each item of the speaking test . In the table below , progress % is calculated in this formual ($x - c / c * 100$) .Where x = the mean of experimental group , c = the mean of controlled group .

Table(7). Progress Percent between Experimental and Controlled Group

Factor		N	Mean	Std.	Progress %
Fluency	Controlled Group	50	2.88	0.689	38%
	Experimental Group	50	3.96	0.570	
Pronunciation	Controlled Group	50	2.70	0.614	50%
	Experimental Group	50	4.06	0.586	
Grammar	Controlled Group	50	3.00	0.700	13%
	Experimental Group	50	3.38	0.567	

Content	Controlled Group	50	3.36	0.851	31%
	Experimental Group	50	4.40	0.606	
Vocabulary	Controlled Group	50	3.54	0.762	1%
	Experimental Group	50	3.60	0.728	
Total point	Controlled Group	50	15.30	2.410	26%
	Experimental Group	50	19.32	2.403	

Source: On calculation

As shown in this table the highest percent of progress is pronunciation (50%) which indicates that participants showed a significant progress in pronunciation when TBL was implemented. There is a remarkable increase in mean (2.70) in the controlled group and (4.06) in experimental group. Clearly this indicates that participants' pronunciation skill was improved when they TBLT was applied.

Fluency also showed a remarkable progress with (38%) in the experimental group compared to the controlled group. As found in table (3) this result is significant and indicates that fluency has improved when using TBLT.

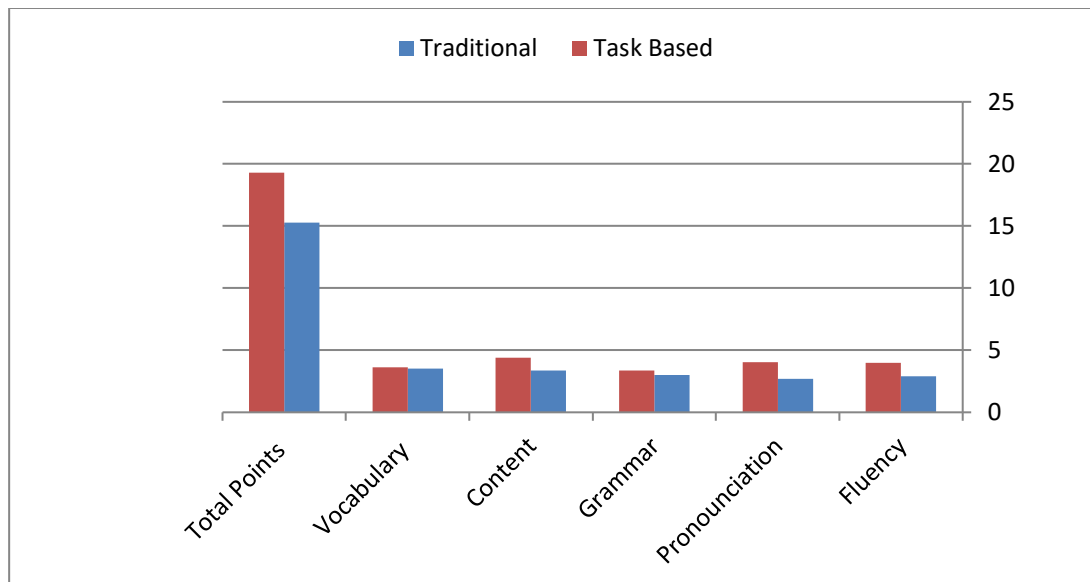
Content as shown in this table was improved at (31%). This means that participants are more knowledgeable about the subject and provide a significant level of detail, given the time available in TBL rather than traditional technique.

Although, Grammar ability has shown a relatively low progress (13%) when the two groups were compared, but is still significant.

Vocabulary on the other hand has shown no change between two groups (1%). Also as mentioned in result in table (6) the result shows no significance.

This result due to the fact that the focus of this study is on speaking skill rather than vocabulary. Thus, in teaching material it is not the subject of concern and it does not affect therefor, by using different technique.

Figure (2): Independent Sample t- test



Source: On calculation

8. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it could be cogently concluded that applying task based approach in EFL class has a significant effect in developing oral communication skills. Consequently, Learners feel well motivated in learning trough task-based approach. Moreover, there was a remarkable improvement in learners` speaking skill when using TBLT. In addition, the study recommended that university teachers should be trained in using task-based approach to develop communication skills.

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المستخلص

هدفت الدراسة الى معرفة أثر فعالية أسلوب تدريس اللغة الانجليزية القائم على المهام (TBLT) لتحسين مهارات الاتصال. تم اختيار عينة عشوائية حجمها خمسين طالباً يدرسون مقرراً للغة الإنجليزية للأعمال ، وقد تم تقسيمهم إلى مجموعتين .تم تدريس المشاركين في المجموعة التجريبية مهارات الاتصال بأسلوب التدريس القائم على المهام ، بينما تم تدريس المجموعة الضابطة عدد نفس الساعات التدريسية بإستخدام أسلوب التدريس التقليدي. أجرى إختبار قبلي وبعدي لكلا المجموعتين ومن ثم إجراء مقارنة بواسطة اختبار (ت) للعينات المستقلة لمعرفة إمكانية وجود فروق معنوية بينهما . أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب الذين تم تدريسهم بإستخدام أسلوب (TBLT) أدى الى تحسن كبير في مهارتى الطلاقة والنطق مقارنة بالأسلوب التقليدي. كما أظهرت النتائج أيضاً تحسن ملحوظ في المجموعة التجريبية في مهارة المخاطبة بإستخدام أسلوب TBLT .